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PERCEPTIONS AND AWARENESS OF VIDEO ASSISTANT REFEREE (VAR) TECHNOLOGY AMONG FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND COACHES AT NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions and level of awareness of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology among football players and coaches at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised football players and coaches of the university, from which a sample of players and coaches was selected using stratified random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to elicit information on respondents' awareness and perceptions of VAR technology. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that football players and coaches generally demonstrated a moderate to high level of awareness of VAR technology and perceived it as a useful tool for improving officiating accuracy and fairness in football matches. However, some concerns were expressed regarding interruptions in match flow and the emotional impact of VAR decisions during games. The study concluded that VAR technology is positively perceived among university football stakeholders and has the potential to enhance fair play if properly implemented. It was recommended that adequate sensitization and training be provided for players, coaches, and match officials to improve understanding and effective application of VAR technology in university football competitions.

Keywords: Video Assistant Referee (VAR), football players, Coaches, Perception and Awareness.

Introduction

Football is one of the most popular sports globally and is characterized by high speed, physical intensity, and emotional engagement from players, coaches, and spectators. Because of the fast-paced nature of the game, referees are often required to make instantaneous decisions that can significantly influence match outcomes. Errors in officiating have therefore remained a major concern in football, as they may affect fairness, competitive balance, and players' trust in match officials.

In response to persistent officiating challenges, football governing bodies introduced the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology as a decision-support system to assist on-field referees in reviewing critical match incidents such as goals, penalty decisions, direct red cards, and cases of mistaken identity (FIFA, 2018). VAR is

designed to minimize human error and promote fairness by providing referees with access to video replays before making final decisions. Studies have shown that the introduction of VAR has contributed to improved decision accuracy and enhanced transparency in football officiating (Ibrahim, 2020; Ugondo & Maggai, 2022).

Despite these reported benefits, the acceptance and effectiveness of VAR largely depend on the perceptions and level of awareness of key stakeholders, particularly players and coaches. According to Ujuagu and Eze (2022), stakeholders' understanding of officiating technologies plays a crucial role in shaping their attitudes toward their adoption and use in competitive sports. When players and coaches perceive such technologies as fair and beneficial, they are more likely to support their implementation; however, limited awareness or misunderstanding may result in resistance, frustration, or emotional reactions during match situations.

In Nigeria, the use of VAR is still developing, especially within university and grassroots football competitions. While several studies have examined the impact of VAR in professional and international leagues, there is limited empirical evidence on how football players and coaches in Nigerian universities perceive and understand VAR technology. This gap in the literature is significant, as university football serves as a developmental platform for future professional athletes and officials (Ujuagu & Eze, 2022).

Therefore, this study examined the perceptions and level of awareness of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology among football players and coaches at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The findings of the study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on sports officiating technology and provide insights that may guide administrators, coaches, and policymakers on the effective introduction and management of VAR in university football competitions.

The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) is a technological innovation introduced in football to support referees in making accurate decisions during matches. VAR involves the use of video footage reviewed by trained officials to assist the on-field referee in evaluating critical incidents such as goals, penalty decisions, red card offenses, and cases of mistaken identity (FIFA, 2018). The primary objective of VAR is to reduce clear and obvious errors and enhance fairness in officiating without undermining the authority of the match referee. Scholars have noted that VAR represents a significant shift from traditional officiating methods to technology-assisted decision-making in sports (Ibrahim, 2020). While the system is intended to improve accuracy, its effectiveness is influenced by how well stakeholders understand its purpose and operational limits.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data on the perceptions and level of awareness of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology among football players and coaches without manipulating any variables. The population of the study comprised all registered football players and coaches of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The population included 140 football players and

10 coaches who were actively involved in university football activities during the period of the study. A sample size of 100 respondents was used for the study, consisting of 90 football players and 10 coaches. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation of both players and coaches in the study.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information on respondents' awareness and perceptions of VAR technology. The instrument consisted of items measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by experts in Human Kinetics and Health Education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha method, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used as the benchmark for decision-making, such that mean scores equal to or above 2.50 were regarded as agreement, while mean scores below 2.50 were regarded as disagreement.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of football players and coaches regarding the impact of VAR technology at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 1: Mean ratings on the perceptions of football players and coaches regarding the impact of VAR technology at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
N=100.

	Mean	SD	Remark
1. One of the primary goals of VAR is to enhance fairness in football matches.	3.04	.66	Agreed
2. Players frequently express dissatisfaction about scoring a goal, only to wait nervously for VAR confirmation.	2.58	.86	Agreed
3. The most widely accepted benefits of VAR technology among football coaches is the improvement in fairness and accuracy of referee decisions.	2.94	.74	Agreed
4. Many coaches argue that the technology disrupts the natural flow of the game.	2.36	.80	Disagreed
5. Some coaches do not experience emotional fatigue do to the unpredictability and delayed nature of VAR decisions.	2.54	.86	Agreed

Table 1 shows that the four questions out of five listed items on the perceptions of football players and coaches regarding the impact of VAR technology at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. However, they disagreed on item number four. The mean scores of the questions are as follows 3.04, 2.58, 2.94, 2.36 and 2.54 respectively. The respondents however have the following scores in SD; .66, .86, .74, .80, and .86 respectively.

Research Question 2: What is the level of awareness of VAR technology among football players and coaches in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

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Table 2: Mean ratings on the level of awareness of VAR technology among football players and coaches in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Players often understand that VAR can be used to overturn goals for offside, to award or cancel penalties, or to review red card offenses.	3.49	.64	Agreed
2. Some players are aware of the technical process involve in a VAR review- such as the use of video replays, the communications between the video assistant and the on field referee.	3.15	.61	Agreed
3. Players knowledge about VAR often comes from several key sources: watching televised matches, social media, discussion with coaches or teammates, and educational programmes provided by football federations.	2.93	.97	Agreed
4. Coaches' awareness level significantly impacts how they prepare their teams for matches and respond to referee decisions during games.	2.05	.97	Disagree
5. The level of awareness of VAR among coaches do not vary based on exposure, training, league level and access to technological updates.	3.07	.74	Agreed

Analysis in Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed in four questions asked on the level of awareness of VAR technology among football players and coaches in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The mean scores of questions 1, 2, 3, and 5 are as follows 3.49, 3.15, 2.93, 2.93 and 3.07 respectively. The respondents however disagreed that coaches' awareness level significantly impacts how they prepare their teams for matches and respond to referee decisions during games (2.05). They have the following scores in SD; .64, .61, .97, .97, and .74 respectively.

Research Question 3: To attitude do players and coaches holds toward the implementation and use of VAR in University-level football?

Table 3: Mean ratings on the attitude do players and coach's holds toward the implementation and use of VAR in University-level football.

	Mean	**SD**	**Remark**
1. Many players have expressed positive attitudes toward VAR due to its role in increasing the fairness and integrity of football.	2.49	.91	Disagreed
2. One of the most common complaints among players and coaches is that VAR do not disrupt the natural flow and rhythm of the game.	3.49	.64	Agreed
3. Coaches often complain about the long pauses involved in reviewing decisions, which can break the momentum of play and affect the mental and physical rhythm of their team.	3.15	.61	Agreed
4. Some coaches also note that VAR reduces the pressure on			

referees, allowing them to officiate with greater confidence, knowing they have technological support.	3.15	.61	Agreed
5. Some players have not adopted a more balanced or conditional stance towards VAR. They are completely opposing the technology but are critical of how it is used.	3.07	.74	Agreed

Analysis in Table 3 shows that the respondents agreed in four of the questions asked out of five on the attitude players and coaches holds toward the implementation and use of VAR in University-level football (mean = 3.49, 3.15, 3.15 and 3.07 respectively). Meanwhile, the respondents disagreed on questions one (mean = 2.49). The respondents however have the following scores in SD; .91, .64, .61, .61, and .74 respectively.

Discussions

The findings of this study revealed that football players and coaches at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka generally held positive perceptions of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology. Respondents acknowledged that VAR contributes to improved officiating accuracy and fairness in football matches. This suggests that stakeholders recognize the value of technology-assisted decision-making in reducing human error, which has long been a challenge in football officiating. These findings align with previous studies that reported positive stakeholder perceptions of VAR due to its role in enhancing decision credibility and fairness (Oladipo & Balogun, 2018; Ibrahim, 2020).

The positive perception observed in this study may be attributed to respondents' exposure to VAR through international football competitions. According to Ujuagu and Eze (2022), familiarity with officiating technologies through repeated exposure increases stakeholders' trust and acceptance of such systems. This supports the view that perception is not only shaped by the effectiveness of VAR but also by stakeholders' understanding of its purpose and benefits.

Findings on awareness indicated that players and coaches demonstrated a moderate to high level of awareness of VAR technology, particularly regarding its purpose and the types of decisions it reviews. However, awareness of the operational procedures of VAR was relatively lower, especially in relation to formal training. This suggests that while stakeholders are generally aware of VAR through media exposure, they may lack comprehensive understanding of how VAR functions in practice. Ujuagu and Eze (2022) similarly noted that limited formal education on officiating technologies contributes to misconceptions and uncertainty among football stakeholders.

The findings on the attitudes of players and coaches toward the implementation and usage of VAR in university-level football revels that that football players and coaches at Nnamdi Azikiwe University generally hold a positive attitude toward the implementation and use of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology in football matches. Overall, the discussion suggests that while VAR is positively perceived among university football stakeholders, its effective adoption

requires increased education, stakeholder engagement, and clear communication during match situations. Addressing these factors may enhance acceptance and reduce negative emotional responses during VAR interventions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study on the perceptions of football players and coaches regarding the impact of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, reveals generally positive views toward its implementation. Participants acknowledged that VAR enhances fairness, reduces officiating errors, and promotes integrity in football matches. Despite some concerns about interruptions and delays in game flow, the majority expressed strong support for the use of VAR in university-level competitions. The findings also indicate a moderate to high level of awareness and understanding of how VAR functions among both players and coaches. Furthermore, their attitudes reflect a willingness to embrace technological innovations aimed at improving sports officiating. These insights suggest that with proper education and consistent application, VAR technology can be successfully integrated into university football systems.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made**:** The university should organize workshops and seminars to improve the understanding of VAR technology among football players, coaches, and referees to ensure proper interpretation and usage. The university football governing body should consider a trial implementation of VAR tools during inter-faculty matches to assess practical challenges and benefits in a controlled environment. Investment should be made in the necessary equipment and skilled personnel to effectively operate VAR systems during matches. Clear guidelines and protocols on VAR usage should be established to minimize confusion and maintain game flow.

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