

ASSESSMENT OF THE STRUCTURE AND FINANCIAL STANDING OF NIGERIA PREMIER FOOTBALL LEAGUE CLUBS IN CONFEDERATION OF AFRICA FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS

¹Adewole Rufus Sunday, ²Oke Joseph Olalekan, ³Yokdi Moses Mulak

Physical And Health Education Department, University of Jos

¹adewoleruffy@gmail.com, ²laksite2003@yahoo.com, ³mulakmosesyokdi@gmail.com.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to assess the structure and financial standing of Nigeria Premier Football League Clubs in Confederation of Africa Football Competitions. Ex-post facto research design was used to carry out the study. The sample size for this study was all NPFL players, coaches and management. Stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 360 respondents used in the study. A self-structured questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. The instrument was pilot tested using a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient and the results obtained was 0.889. The descriptive statistic of frequency counts and percentage were used to analyse the bio-data, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics of Kruskal-wallis was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The findings revealed that there is influence of the structure of Nigeria Premier Football League Clubs in Confederation of Africa Football Competitions ($H = 12.06, p = .003 < 0.05$). There is also influence of financial standing of Nigeria Premier Football League Clubs in Confederation of Africa Football Competitions ($H = 8.652, p = .021 < 0.05$). The study however, recommends that for the Interim Management Committee (IMC) to truly improve the performance of NPFL clubs in CAF competitions, they must improve the quality of the league and create an enabling business environment. Keywords: Assessment, Performance, Influence, Structure, Financial, Nigeria Premier Football League, Confederation of Africa Football.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerians have a strong passion for sports, where sport is referred to as religion', a spiritual entity and an instrument for community cohesion. Ajidua (2016) reported that eight (8) out of every ten (10) Nigerians are sports fans. As this number continues to increase, so does the demand for improved performance and more competition. According to the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, the practice of sport is vital to the development of youths and the enhancement of social integration, having the capacity to build social connections (Okolie-Osemene, 2013). In the same vein, football is not only popular in Africa but is also part of the continent's social culture (Chiweshe, 2014).

The importance of sports cannot be downplayed in any society, especially in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country such as Nigeria, where football is widely regarded as a unifying factor among diverse ethnic and religious groups (Giulianotti, 2012; Amara, 2012). Sports play a significant role in promoting socio-economic development, fostering intergroup relations, and enhancing peace and social cohesion within society (Coalter, 2007; United Nations, 2003). Nigeria

has numerous football clubs owned and managed by both government and private individuals at various levels of competition (NFF, 2024). The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), headquartered in Abuja, serves as the governing body responsible for regulating football activities in the country (NFF, 2024). However, disputes regarding the scheduling and commencement of football seasons have affected the Nigeria Premier Football League since the early 2000s, resulting in an inconsistent league calendar and administrative instability (Oluwashina, 2018; FIFA, 2022).

Playing and watching football have achieved phenomenal global success and enjoy considerable popularity across all continents of the world due to the sport's ability to transcend linguistic, cultural, and geographical barriers. Football has become a global phenomenon in which players frequently migrate across countries and continents to play for clubs seeking their talent and expertise (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; FIFA, 2023). Football is one of the elite sports that offers youths opportunities for meaningful engagement and productive livelihoods in Nigeria (Akindes, 2011; Amara, 2012). Beyond the recreational value it provides, football enables individuals to develop their talents, pursue professional careers, and create opportunities for personal and community development (Coalter, 2013). Through football, many young Nigerians have secured opportunities to play professionally in Europe, North America, Asia, and other African countries, where they earn substantial incomes and enjoy improved socioeconomic conditions. For many of these athletes, participation in football has facilitated international mobility and career advancement that would otherwise have been difficult to attain (Poli, Ravenel, & Besson, 2023; FIFA, 2023).

Chiweshe (2014) opined that good African players are taken to Europe at a young age due to the commercialization of football and the global reach of European clubs. No doubt, sport has become a big commercial enterprise, which heightens disputes and litigation as a result of associated competition and regulation (Chiweshe, 2014; Razano, 2014). Pannenburg (2016) observed that, considering the fact that sports are closely related to development issues, individuals, organizations, and companies are using sports, especially football, to achieve various development goals that seem to address their personal needs. It is crucial to add here that such personal needs and the search for means of livelihood motivate players to travel to other countries. There is obviously an economic attachment to these annual football competitions in Nigeria. For instance, the welfare of the players involved is given high priority by some communication and beverage companies that agree to sponsor the teams.

Success in domestic football leagues is often viewed as a pathway to continental and international competitions, particularly the CAF Champions League and CAF Confederation Cup. Consequently, clubs are expected to strategically plan their financial, logistical, and technical resources to meet the demands of international participation (CAF, 2024; FIFA, 2023). However, Nigerian clubs have frequently encountered challenges arising from the misalignment of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) calendar with the Confederation of African Football (CAF) competition schedule, thereby limiting adequate preparation for continental tournaments (NFF, 2024; Oluwashina, 2018). Historically, the poor performances of Nigerian clubs in

continental competitions have been attributed to inadequate planning, including late arrival at match venues, insufficient knowledge of opponents' playing conditions, poor adaptation to different climatic conditions, and inadequate preparation for artificial playing surfaces commonly used in North African countries (Onwumechili, 2009; Darby, Akindes, & Kirwin, 2007). Although these challenges have evolved over time, effective club management, strategic planning, and investment in player welfare remain fundamental determinants of success in modern football. The quality of football performance largely depends on the calibre of players, while the manner in which players are developed, managed, and motivated significantly influences their performance and overall team success (Taylor, Doherty, McGraw, & Dixon, 2015; Coalter, 2013). From findings, many clubs are in financial trouble with their players. It is tough to get out and play when they have money issues lingering. Kano Pillars, one of the most successful and financially stable football clubs in Nigeria, has nevertheless recorded inconsistent performances in continental competitions, suggesting that financial resources alone do not guarantee success at the international level. Alaka and Omoniyi (2021) identified three major factors responsible for the poor performance of Nigerian clubs in continental competitions: inadequate strategic planning and administration, poor technical and tactical preparation, and weak player welfare and motivation. According to the authors, sustainable success in continental football requires not only adequate funding but also effective governance, sound club management, long-term player development, and professional organizational structures.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Football is one of the most popular sports and an agent for the promotion and propagation of economic and social-political values in a nation. Football serves as a pedestal on which greater economic, social, and political attainments are built. The strength of a football league is reflected in how well its representatives do in continental competitions. Based on that simple yardstick, how has the League Management Company (LMC) impacted the league since it assumed control? According to Irabor (2019), a plethora of challenges are facing the Nigeria Professional Football League. The challenges range from inadequate funding occasioned by lack of sponsorship, bad club organization, descript facilities, poor player welfare, which is responsible for the exodus, and a lack of cooperation interest in the league, among others. The immediate past season was played without a title sponsor, and home teams were forced to foot the indemnities of the match officials. This situation led to many away teams accusing their hosts of bribing referees to secure home victories. This situation has seen opposing fans and match officials under attack at match venues in previous seasons. Starting the league after several postponements is a welcome development, but there is a need to ensure that all the loose ends are fixed.

In the last ten years (2011–2021), no Nigerian football club reached the final of either the CAF Champions League or the CAF Confederation Cup, reflecting the declining competitiveness of Nigerian clubs in continental football during the period (CAF, 2021; Oluwashina, 2018). Lack of adequate security and concerns over the quality of officiating have remained persistent challenges confronting the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL), often affecting the credibility and

competitiveness of the league (Oluwashina, 2018; FIFA, 2023). Home advantage is widely recognized in football; however, the widespread perception among some stakeholders that home teams are expected to win every match undermines confidence in the fairness of officiating and league administration (Pollard, 2008; FIFA, 2023). Furthermore, there has been a noticeable decline in the performance of Nigerian clubs in CAF interclub competitions over the past decade. Between 2011 and 2021, no Nigerian club reached the final of either the CAF Champions League or the CAF Confederation Cup, reflecting the diminishing competitiveness of Nigerian club football on the continent (CAF, 2021; The Guardian Nigeria, 2024). A review of Nigeria's continental record further illustrates this decline. Since the inception of the African Cup of Champions Clubs (now the CAF Champions League) in 1964, Nigerian clubs have reached the final on seven occasions. Enyimba Football Club remains the country's only champion, having won back-to-back titles in 2003 and 2004, while Rangers International (1975), Shooting Stars Sports Club (1984 and 1996), and Iwuanyanwu Nationale/Heartland FC (1988 and 2009) finished as runners-up (CAF, 2021; Enyimba FC, 2023). Similarly, Nigerian clubs have struggled in the CAF Confederation Cup since its establishment in 2004 through the merger of the African Cup Winners' Cup and the CAF Cup, with no Nigerian club having won the competition to date (CAF, 2024; African Football, 2024)

Why is it that NPFL clubs are not living up to expectations in CAF club football competitions? Many questions have been asked in the wake of the teams crashing out in CAF competitions. Who is to be blamed? Is it the LMC, NFF, clubs, players, coaches, or the football culture? The researchers, in light of these observations, were prompted to assess the performance of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs in the Confederation of African Football Competition.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain the opinions of players, coaches, and club management on how the structure and financial standing of Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) clubs influence their performance in Confederation of African Football (CAF) competitions without manipulating any of the study variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Nworgu, 2015). This design is widely used in sports management research involving the collection of data through questionnaires.

Population of the Study

The population for the study comprised 1,002 respondents, consisting of all licensed NPFL players, coaches, and club management personnel from clubs participating in the Nigeria Premier Football League during the period of the study.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A sample of 360 respondents was selected from the study population using a combination of stratified, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques. Stratified sampling was used to classify respondents into three groups: management, coaches, and players. Purposive sampling was used to select management personnel and coaches because of their direct involvement in football administration and technical decision-making, while simple random sampling was used to select players to ensure that every eligible player had an equal chance of being selected.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Structure and Financial Standing of NPFL Clubs Questionnaire (SFSNPFLCQ)."

The questionnaire consisted of seven sections (A–G).

Section A: Demographic information (club, gender, status, age, years of experience, and educational qualification).

Section B: Structure of NPFL clubs and club performance.

Section C: Financial standing of NPFL clubs and club performance.

Sections D–G: Other organizational factors relating to recruitment practices, preparation for competitions, facilities and equipment, coaching quality, and club performance.

The questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert rating scale as follows:

Strongly Agree (SA) = 5

Agree (A) = 4

Undecided (UD) = 3

Disagree (D) = 2

Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1

A criterion mean of 3.50 was used for decision-making.

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity by three experts, comprising two specialists in Sports Management and one specialist in Measurement and Evaluation, Faculty of Education. Their observations, corrections, and recommendations were incorporated before the final administration of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot study was conducted using respondents outside the study area who possessed similar characteristics to the study participants. The data obtained from the pilot study were analyzed using the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a reliability index of 0.889. This value indicated that the instrument possessed high internal consistency and was therefore suitable for data collection.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher, assisted by trained research assistants, personally administered the questionnaires to the selected respondents. The completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately after completion to ensure a high response rate and minimize non-response bias.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze respondents' demographic characteristics, while mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The Kruskal–Wallis H test was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance because the study involved comparing the responses of three independent groups (management, coaches, and players).

RESULTS

Hypothesis One: There is no Significant Influence of the Structure of Nigeria Premier Football League Clubs on the Performance of Nigerian Football Clubs in Confederation of African Football competitions.

The data collected from the Management, Coaches and Players were summarized and tested using non-parametric statistics (Kruskal-Wallis) at 0.05% level of significance. The summary of the hypothesis tested is presented in Table 4.8:

Table 4.8: Summary of Kruskal-Wallis Test on Structure of Nigeria Premier Football League Clubs on the Performance of Nigerian Football Clubs.

Group	N	Mean Rank	H Cal	H Crt	df	P-value	Decision
Management	24	733.41					
Coaches	77	682.57		5.991			
Players	257	583.78	12.06		2	.003	Rejected
	358						

(H cal.= 12.06, H crt.=5.991 P=.003<0.05)

Table 4.8 shows Kruskal-Wallis's statistics calculated to ascertain that there is no significant influence of the structure of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs on the performance of Nigerian football clubs. The table shows that $H = 12.06$, $p = .003 < 0.05$ at 2 degrees of freedom. The result, however, indicates that NPFL clubs will perform better in continental competitions if the NPFL calendar, stable and non-interrupted league season, and synergy between league management companies are done in line with CAF calendars. Therefore, there is no significant influence of the structure of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs on the performance of Nigerian football clubs in Confederation of African Football competitions, which is hereby rejected. This result implies that there is a significant influence of the structure of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs on the performance of Nigerian football clubs in confederation African football competitions.

Hypothesis Two: There is no Significant Influence of the financial standing of Nigeria Premier football League Clubs on the Performance of Nigerian Football Clubs in Confederation of African Football Competitions. The data collected from the Management, Coaches and Players were summarized and tested using non-parametric statistics (Kruskal-Wallis) at 0.05% level of significance. The summary of the hypothesis tested is presented in Table 4.9:

Table 4.9: Summary of Kruskal-Wallis Test on the influence of financial standing of Nigeria Premier football League Clubs on the Performance

Group	N	Mean Rank	H Cal	HCrt	df	P-value	Decision
Management	24	639.15					
Coaches	77	672.53	8.652	5.991	2	.021	
Players	257	691.07					Rejected
	358						

(H cal.= 8.652, H crt.= 5.991 P=.021<0.05)

Table 4.9 shows Kruskal-Wallis's statistics calculated to ascertain the influence of the financial standing of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs on the performance of Nigerian football clubs in the Confederation of African Football Competitions. The table shows that $H = 8.652$, $p = .021 < 0.05$ at 2 degrees of freedom. The result, however, indicates that NPFL clubs will perform better if sustainable sources of finance, observance of rules and regulations of financial practice, and securing TV rights for live transmission of matches in continental competitions influence the financial standing of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs. Therefore, the hypothesis, which states there is no significant influence of the financial standing of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs on the performance of Nigerian football clubs in the Confederation of African Football Competitions, is hereby rejected. This result implies that the financial standing of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs influences the performance of Nigerian football clubs in the Confederation of African Football Competitions.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The result, indicates that NPFL clubs will perform better in continental competitions if the NPFL league calendar, stable and non-interrupted league season, and synergy between league management companies are done in line with CAF calendars. Therefore, there is no significant influence of the structure of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs on the performance of

Nigerian football clubs in Confederation of African Football competitions, which is hereby rejected. This result implies that there is a significant influence of the structure of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs on the performance of Nigerian football clubs in confederation African football competitions. The findings corroborate the study of Ajadi (2022) on the influence of management structure on the performance of Kwara United Football Club in the Nigeria Premier League. The findings revealed that internal crises, leadership styles, and appointments of people to the board have significant influence on the performance of clubs in the Nigeria Premier League and that management should not give room for internal crises and should appoint people with the right skills and experience to the board. The study also agrees with the findings of Ogunsanwo and Akinyemi (2021), whose findings also reveal that the league structure, which is based on a promotion and relegation system, is a major factor in the low level of competitive balance, which means no team has an unfair advantage over the others. Furthermore, the league could improve competitive balance by introducing a more balanced system, such as a salary cap or luxury tax. The study's findings suggest that the NPFL could improve team performance by strengthening its leadership and reward systems. This could be done by providing more training and development opportunities for coaches and managers and by increasing the financial rewards for players. Another study by Onagbiye (2009) found that the development of administrative and management structures that can promote the game of soccer has not been put in place in Nigeria. The paper also found that the Nigerian Football Association (NFA), now the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), has been judged to perform below expectations due to the lack of qualified hands, which do not possess the administrative elements and often lead to administrative mistakes and mismanagement. It was concluded that for the effective administration and management of football (soccer) to

function effectively, it calls for adequate administrative and management machinery and expert personnel.

The result, indicates that NPFL clubs will perform better if sustainable sources of finance, observance of rules and regulations of financial practice, and securing TV rights for live transmission of NPFL matches influence the financial standing of Nigerian premier football league clubs. This result implies that the financial standing of Nigerian Premier Football League clubs influences the performance of Nigerian football clubs in the Confederation of African Football Competitions. The findings corroborate the study of Nwankwo and Udoka (2020), whose study reveals that financial instability can have a negative impact on performance in the NPFL. The study further states that clubs that are financially unstable are more likely to experience players' exodus, poor recruitment, and a lack of investment in infrastructure, which can lead to a decline in performance and a decrease in the club's chances of success. Ogunsanwo and Akinyemi (2021), in their own study, also agreed that financial fair play (FFP) can help to reduce the financial imbalances, which is a gap between expenditure and income between clubs, and make the league more competitive, but they are of the opinion that financial fair play (FFP) is not a silver bullet and it will not solve all the problems in the NPFL. The findings of these studies suggest that the financial standing of a club can have a significant impact on its performance. Clubs with a higher financial standing are more likely to be successful. However, financial instability can also have a negative impact on performance. The league could promote competitive balance by enforcing financial fair play rules.

CONCLUSION

The researcher drew his conclusions from the findings of the study, as follows:

1. There was significant influence of the structure of Nigeria premier football league clubs in confederation of Africa football competitions.
2. There was significant influence of financial standing of Nigeria premier football league clubs in confederation of Africa football competitions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. For the LMC to truly improve the performance of NPFL clubs in CAF competitions, they should improve the quality of the league as well as everything that surrounds it such as stable football calendar and the structure of the league.
2. LMC and NFF must work together to create an enabling business environment and remove all impediment that inhibit deals with cooperate financial brands.

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