

**ASSESSING THE RECREATIONAL INTERESTS AND PURSUITS OF  
SENIOR NATIONAL SOCCER PLAYERS IN A MULTICULTURAL  
SOCIETY: THE NIGERIA SUPER EAGLES' EXPERIENCE.**

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# **ASSESSING THE RECREATIONAL INTERESTS AND PURSUITS OF SENIOR NATIONAL SOCCER PLAYERS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY: THE NIGERIA SUPER EAGLES' EXPERIENCE**

## **ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of the study was to examine the recreational interests and pursuits of Senior National Soccer players (the Super Eagles) before, during and after a major competition such as the African Cup of Nations, bearing in mind the multicultural background of the players in particular, and Nigeria in general. To this effect a structured questionnaire of twenty items were administered on 22 players as sampled respondents during the Cup of Nations held in Ghana from 20<sup>th</sup> January to 10<sup>th</sup> February 2008. An analysis of their responses using descriptive statistical tools of frequency-percentage; and inferential statistic of Chi-square with alpha level of 0.05 for the testing and rejection, or otherwise, of stated null hypotheses, shows among other things, that: the players have a significantly defined pattern of recreational interests and pursuits; there are significant differences in their recreational interests and pursuits. It was recommended, among other things, that such interests and pursuits should be sustained as a means of gainful use of surplus leisure hours, and balancing work with play.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this research, the main purpose was to examine the recreational interests being pursued by Senior National Soccer Players of Nigeria, the Super Eagles, before, during and after a major soccer competition, such as the Africa-Cup of Nations, bearing in mind the multicultural backgrounds of the players in particular and the Nigeria nation in general.

The researcher's enthusiasm in assessing the recreational interests and pursuits was based on the maxim that "all work and no play make Jack a dull boy", and "all play and no work make him a stupid boy". The researcher is convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that the Super Eagles players cannot afford to be engaged in a twenty-four-hour active soccer training or competition. There is the urgent need for them to balance active soccer playing with relaxation in the form of recreation.

This is because all-work-and-no play tend to encourage tension and stress. Tension and stress seem to be synonymous with active footballing in a highly

competitive setting. Agbo and Adeleye (2004) report that soccer players at the senior category and at international level do find time to engage actively in recreation at their leisure hours. They report that such players spend as many as two hours viewing related films, listening to news and chatting.

According to Agbo and Adeleye (2004), Umeasiegbu (2008) and Sohi (1988), soccer players find time to relax by engaging in recreation. They maintain that there are significant differences in their (players') recreational interests and pursuits. They state that such recreational activities can be grouped into four categories thus:

1. **Informal Recreational Activities:** These include the following: crafts and arts, gambling, ludo, draught and whot (cards). Others are “ayo”, or “Ede” or “okwe”, jogging, strolling and fishing.
2. **Social Recreational Activities:** They cover the following: Attending parties and other social gatherings, dancing, singing, visitation and photographing. Others are viewing television, listening to radio, playing musical instruments, dating and attending club meetings etc.
3. **Literary Recreational Activities:** In this category are: reading for pleasure, debating, writing (novels, books, tracts etc), telling educative stories, riddles and jokes, quiz and discussions.
4. **Formal or Major Games (Physical Recreation):** They include:
  - a. Ball games like volleyball, Basketball football etc.
  - b. Racket games such as tennis, table tennis, badminton.
  - c. Aquatics such as swimming, diving, fishing water polo etc.
  - d. Martial arts e.g. judo, karate, taekwondo etc.

This research featured recreational activities in this four categories. In the research too, recreational interests refer to those activities that people desire to participate in but do not. While recreational pursuits refer to the activities they actually take part in. (Agbo, 2007; Ajala, 1988; Riggs, 2005 and Amuchie, 2002). They form the purpose of the research

## **PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

The main purpose of the research was to examine the recreational interests and pursuits of the players of Super Eagles of Nigeria before, during and after a major competition such as the Africa Cup of Nations, taking into account the multi-cultural backgrounds of the players in particular, and Nigeria in general. In specific terms, the research examined the following:

1. To ascertain the recreational activities the players would have loved to take part in if given the chance of opportunity by time, space and teamhandlers. Such activities constitute recreational interests of the players.
2. To ascertain the recreational activities the players actually participate in as permitted by time, space and the teamhandlers. Such activities constitute recreational pursuits of the players.

Those two purposes as stated above formed the basis for the two null hypotheses stated below.

## **NULL HYPOTHESES**

1. There is no significant difference in the recreational interests of the Super Eagles players despite the diversity in their socio-cultural (ethnic) and educational backgrounds.
2. There is no significant difference in the recreational pursuits of the players, their ethnic and educational backgrounds notwithstanding.

## **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

In this research, the methods and procedures centre on the following areas: research design, population, sample and sampling method, and instrument for data collection. Others are validation of the instrument, administration of the instrument, and procedures for data analyses.

### **Research Design:**

A survey research was used in the study. The choice of this design was based on the large area coverage and scattered nature of the population for the study.

## **Population**

In terms of human population, all the players of the Super Eagles that were invited, and taken, to Ghana for the 2008 Africa Cup of Nations constituted the population for the study. Out of the population, a sample was chosen.

## **Sample and Sampling Method**

From the 22 players, 14 of them (i.e. first 11 and 3 substitutes) were sampled using simple random sampling method without replacement. The choice of this method was based on the fact that it is the most appropriate in giving all the players a fair chance and equal opportunity of being selected or otherwise.

## **Instrument for Data Collection**

A structured 20-item questionnaire was used as main instrument for data collection. It consists of three sections thus:

Section A: Biodata of the respondents; section B: Recreational interests of the players, and section C: Recreational pursuits of the players. The instrument comprises a three-point rating scale (an abridged version of Likert Scale) of Agreed (3 points), Undecided (2 points), and Disagree (1 point).

## **Validation of the Instrument:**

The structured questionnaire was validated by the researcher and other experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Psychology ABU-FCE Zaria Campus for both face and content validities. A split-half method was used in the validation. A reliability co-efficient ( $r$ ) value of 0.85 was obtained. Such a value, according to Popham (1997), is considered to be very high and confers a very high validity on the instrument.

## **Administration of the Instrument:**

The 14 copies of the questionnaire was administered directly to the players by the researcher, with the permission of the technical crew, in their hotel in Takoradi/Secondi Ghana before their fist match against Ivory Coast on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2008 during the Africa Cup of Nations tagged Ghana '08.

The 14 copies were retrieved immediately from the players after filling them, through the Chief Coach. The researcher was a live participant observer during the soccer fiesta.

**Procedures for Data Analyses:**

The 14 correctly filled and returned copies of the questionnaire were tallied and then subjected to statistical analyses using both descriptive and inferential tools of statistics. A simple frequency tabular format presentation was used.

Simple frequency (f), percentage (%) and mean ( $\bar{O}$ ) were the descriptive statistical tools used, while Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistic was used to test for significant difference in recreational interests and pursuits of the players. Chi –square was chosen because it is the most appropriate in a study that involves expectations versus realities.

Alpha level ( $\alpha$ ) was set at 0.05 one tailed test of  $\chi^2$  for the rejection, or otherwise, of the stated null hypotheses. The details are as shown below in the tabular results.

**Note**

Serial Nos. 1-14 were used in place of names of the players so as to conceal their true identities. These numbers bear no identity or resemblance to those on the jerseys of the players.

## THE RESULTS

**Table 1: Bio-data of the Super Eagles Players (n-14)**

S/N	Variable Statements								
	Age (yrs)	Ethnicity	Lang spoken	Height (m)	Weight (kg)	Experience (years)	Highest Acad. Qualif	post Held	Remark
1	22	Effik	Eng., Effik	1.56	65.4	8.0	1st Degree	Asst	fit
2	19	Hausa	Eng, Hausa	1.70	67.2	6.5	Diploma	Capt	fit
3	30	Igbo	Eng., Igbo	1.63	66.4	5.5	1st Degree	member	“
4	21	Yoruba	Eng., Yoruba	1.71	70.1	6.0	Diploma	Captain	“
5	20	Hausa	Eng., Hausa	1.73	70.3	6.0	Sch Cert.	member	“
6	22	Minority	Eng., Nupe	1.67	68.7	5.0	1st Degree	member	“
7	19	Igbo	Eng, Igbo	1.68	67.5	7.5	Diploma	“	“
8	18	Yoruba	Eng., Yoruba	1.65	68.2	6.0	Sch Cert.	“	“
9	24	Ibibio	Eng., Ibibio	1.71	70.0	7.5	Diploma	“	“
10	25	Igbo	Eng., Igbo	1.74	69.6	7.5	HND	“	“
11	23	Yoruba	Eng., Yoruba	1.67	70.2	6.0	1st Degree	“	“
12	22	Minority	Eng., Itsekiri	1.70	67.5	5.0	Diploma	“	“
13	26	Hausa	Eng., Hausa	1.72	68.7	5.5	Diploma	“	“
14	27	Minority	Eng., Igala	1.74	70.2	8.0		“	“
	Mean: 23			1.67	68.6	6.4			

**Source:** The Researcher's Survey

The major highlights of Table 1 are follows:

The Super Eagles (players) depict the multi-ethnic nationalities that make up the big “contraption” or “incompatible entity” called Nigeria. The average (mean) age of the players is 23 years as at 2008. their average height, body mass (weight) and years of playing experience are 1.67metres, 68.6kg and 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> years respectively.

The table also shows that the players were equally academically minded as many of them have first degree or its equivalent (HND).

**Table 2: Recreational Interests of the Players ( n=14)**

Responses to Recreational Activity Interests																
S/N	Informal Rec.			Social Rec.			Literary Rec.			Physical Rec. (games)			O	RMK	X <sup>2</sup>	
	A 3	U 2	D 1	A 3	U 2	D 1	A 3	U 2	D 1	A 3	U 2	D 1				
1	9 64%	3 21%	2 15%	12 85%	1 7%	1 7%	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	2.7	U	51.864	
2	10 71%	2 15%	2 15%	12 85%	0 0%	2 15%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	11 78%	3 22%	0 0%	2.7	U	55.949	
3	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	12 85%	2 15%	0 0%	2.8	U	60.680	
4	10 71%	3 22%	1 7%	12 85%	0 0%	2 15%	12 85%	2 15%	0 0%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	2.6	U	53.723	
5	12 85%	0 0%	2 15%	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	12 85%	0 0%	2 15%	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	2.7	U	55.811	
6	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	11 78%	3 22%	0 0%	2.8	U	61.023	
7	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	12 85%	2 15%	0 0%	9 63%	3 22%	2 15%	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	2.6	U	52.211	
8	12 85%	2 15%	0 0%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	2.8	U	60.560	
9	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	2.7	U	54.022	
10	11 78%	1 7%	2 15%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	12 86%	2 14%	0 0%	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	2.7	U	55.124	
11	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	2.6	U	49.240	
12	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	11 78%	3 22%	0 0%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	2.7	U	51.386	
13	12 85%	0 0%	2 15%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	10 71%	1 7%	3 22%	10 70%	2 15%	2 15%	2.8	U	56.204	
14	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	11 78%	2 15%	1 7%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	2.9	U	61.921	

Critical X<sup>2</sup> value = 43.773; df = 143 ; p = 0.05 (one tail)

**Source:** The Researcher's Survey.

Table 2 shows, among other things, that statistically speaking, the mean responses indicate that the players were undecided with regard to their recreational interests. Going by mathematical approximation, all the mean values can be approximated to a whole number of 3.

This approximation, coupled with the raw responses, shows an “agreed” response to recreational interests by the players.

The Table further shows that all the obtained  $X^2$  values are greater than the critical value of 43.773 at 143 degrees of freedom, (df), and alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, null hypothesis 1 which states that there is no significant difference in the recreational interests of the players is rejected. The alternative is accepted.

This implies that there is a significant difference in the players’ recreational interests.

**Table 3: Recreational Pursuits of the Players ( n=14)**

Responses to Recreational Activity Pursuits															
S/N	Informal Rec.			Social Rec.			Literary Rec.			Physical Rec.(genes)			$\theta$	RMK	$X^2$
	A 3	U 2	D 1	A 3	U 2	D 1	A 3	U 2	D 1	A 3	U 2	D 1			
1	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	12 86%	0 0%	2 14%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	2.9	U	61.211
2	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	2.9	U	64.021
3	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	2.9	U	66.211
4	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	3.0	A	68.110
5	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	2.9	U	65.450
6	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	3.0	A	68.214
7	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	13 93%	0 0%	0 0%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	2.9	U	61.511
8	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	2.8	U	57.410
9	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	2.9	U	60.262
10	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	2.9	U	59.110
11	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	2.8	U	61.012
12	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	2.9	U	58.231
13	12 86%	1 7%	1 7%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	13 93%	0 0%	1 7%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	2.8	U	56.001
14	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	13 93%	1 7%	0 0%	14 100%	0 0%	0 0%	3.0	A	66.522
Critical $X^2$ value value = 43.773; df = 143 ; p = 0.05 (one tail)															

**Source:** The Researcher's Survey.

In Table 3, the following are the major highlights. The raw responses, together with approximations of the mean responses, to whole numbers of 3, indicate that the players participated in informal, social, literary and physical recreational activities at their leisure time.

The table also shows that all the calculated  $X^2$  value are greater than the critical value of 143.773 at 43df and alpha level of 0.05. Consequently, null hypothesis 2 which states that there is no significant difference in the recreational pursuits of the Super Eagles players is also rejected. The alternative is accepted. This implies that there is a significant difference in their participation in those specified categories of recreational activities.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The responses of the Super Eagles Players in the two Tables show that they have varied and diverse recreational interests and pursuits in keeping with Nigeria's unity in diversity. This finding is not and should not be, a surprise to any close watcher of events in Nigeria. This is because it is often said that Nigeria becomes a strongly united country when it comes to issues of soccer especially when it involves the senior National Team, the Super Eagles.

The findings agree with the reports by Agbo and Adeleye (2004) Umeasiegbu (2001), Ajala (1988) and Solu (1988) that Nigeria soccer players find time to participate training schedule preparatory to major soccer competitions at the international level; and that their recreational interests and pursuits differ significantly according to their multi-cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Direct personal observation of the Super Eagles players in their hotels during major soccer fiesta shows that they come to such competition with recreational facilities/equipment such as draught, "Ayo", Ludo, Whot, among others.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In concluding this research, by way of findings, it is established that:

1. the bio-data of the Super Eagles Players are diverse and varied which are a reflection of rich multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria as an amalgamation of seemingly incompatible ethnic nationalities bound together by the spirit of tolerance, accommodation and English Language as a lingua franca.
2. there is a significant difference in the recreational interests of the players.

3. there is also a significant difference in their recreational pursuits of the players.
4. they actually participate actively in recreational activities, namely informal, social, literary and physical activities at their leisure time in their hotel during major soccer competitions such as the Africa Cup of Nations.

Based on those findings, it is recommended as follows:

- i. Since the players cannot and will not, be engaged in active soccer playing at old age, there is the dire need for them to learn and acquire appropriate skills/knowledge in life-time and survival recreational sports like swimming in an organized recreation.
- ii. There is also the need for the Super Eagles to have a recreation expert in the management crew.

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